



Facilitating the Translation of Research Evidence to Policy & Practice – The INDEPTH Experience

David Mbulumi

Policy Engagement and Communications Manager

INDEPTH Secretariat

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Content

- Key processes for research translation
- Main Activities:
 In-Country Research to Policy meetings
- Way forward



Vision

INDEPTH's resolve in influencing policy is very evident:

- Tag Line: *Better Health Information for Better Health Policy.*
- Vision of the INDEPTH Network:
“INDEPTH will be an international network of longitudinal demographic research institutions that provides health and demographic data **to enable developing countries set health priorities and policies based on the best available evidence** and to guide the cost-effective use of tools, interventions and systems to ensure and monitor progress towards national goals.”
- Strategic objectives (3rd):
To facilitate the translation of INDEPTH findings to maximize impact on policy and practice.



Background –Translating research 1

Three key processes are necessary to translating research evidence to inform policies and practice. These are:

- Production of high-quality research which has policy relevance;
- Appropriate communication of the findings in formats that are relevant to the users; and
- Effective researcher- end-user engagement.

In the 1st key process: *Production of high-quality research which has policy relevance;*

- Markers of high-quality research are **validity**, usually endorsed by peers through the peer-review process in scientific journal publications, and **replicability**, which is possible when other scientists have access to the data to replicate analyses or experiments.



Background - Translating research 2

- Data quality? Last decade INDEPTH put highest priority on quality control of the data and standardisation of data collection methods;
- In 2013, the Network launched publicly available online data archives, **INDEPTH Data Repository** and **INDEPTHStats**, opening up access to core demographic indicators and data, which researchers, **policymakers and general public can use to guide their decision making**;
- Done so well in publications: books, journal collections (average of 500 peer reviewed papers per year).



Background Translating research 3

In the 2nd key process: *Appropriate communication of the findings in formats that are relevant to the users:*

- These may include stakeholder dissemination workshops, policy briefs, face-to-face briefings, media interviews, press releases, giving expert evidence to committees, website summaries, social media and so on.
- Done lot of effort in external engagements (to promote the Network in major forums/organisations), involved in expert committees (e.g. on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics), systematic review papers, media relations (press releases, newspaper, magazine) online publishing and social media, and other platforms: newsletters.



Background Translating research 4

In the 3rd key process: *Researcher-end user engagement:* In almost ideal researcher-end-user relationships, end-users may proactively demand research evidence or commission research projects, and researchers become the “go to” place for high quality advice and information.

Related to this key process, INDEPTH last year and 2014 organised In-Country meetings that brought together Policymakers, researchers, media, community representatives and other important stakeholders. Aim:

- Promote HDSSs in the policy community;
- Hear from both sides: Researchers side and policymakers side;
- Link them so they begin to interact/dialogue;

Meetings in Ghana (Navrongo), India (Pune) and Tanzania (Dar es Salaam)



Main Activities In-Country Meetings

Ghana In-Country Meeting, Navrongo, Dec 2014



In-Country Meetings

India In-Country Meeting, Pune, Jan 2015



INDEPTH Network
Better Health Information for Better Health Policy

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In-Country Meetings

Tanzania In-Country Meeting



Issues raised – Keep messages simple

Researchers should keep their messages straight and simple.

Research is difficult to access or is not being translated in a user-friendly form for the policymakers and other people who could influence policymakers e.g. media: They distribute Scientific publications, Distribute Power point presentations, Very detailed reports.

Have different templates: Summaries in simple language, that use dot points, diagrams, pictures that can easily understood by non scientists and easily distributed and for major reports that contain the full findings.



Issues raised – Maintain regular contact

High staff turnover in the policymaking community (relationships made over time disappear when the post holder moves to another office).

Researchers (themselves) work in silos within institutions. Also researchers not interested to interact with people outside research community.

Develop mechanisms to share information – internal newsletters, regular internal meetings, Scientific committees – discuss proposals. Put everybody in the picture.

Identify key people and give them regular updates: peers, funders, policy makers, media.



Engaging them – Misalignment of priorities

- Policy makers are under political pressure to get answers. **Researchers should try to link directly to some of the work that governments are struggling to find answers to.**
- “They don’t use our findings.” **Response** “ Researcher picks a problem to research about, sets the questions, does the research..then expect me to be interested in their results and use them!”
- “We invite them in our meetings, they rarely come.”
- **Response:** “Government officials get many invitations to attend meetings. So you have to be very clear and make your agenda interesting for us to choose your meetings over others. You also need to learn how to lobby.”
- **Take time and effort to build relationships with policy makers– Make them part of scientific committees, Boards etc. Involve them in planning. Seek out opportunities to attend forums and conferences organised and/or attended by policy makers.**
- **OR Create Forums and networks to bring together researchers and non-academic end-users of research.**



Issues raised – Priority is scientific publications

Researchers prioritise publication of articles in refereed journals over other forms of presenting and discussing research.

Reasons for this given by researchers included:

- High time and effort costs in relationship building and translating results
- Reward systems and funding structures which do not adequately recognise or reward dissemination and non-academic research use and impact.
- **Find ways of motivating researchers who come with innovative ways of sharing their findings (take part in media interviews, write newspaper commentaries, blogs, briefs, etc)**



Issues raised - Media/Community/Apathy

- Media: Researchers give us reports in language and formats we can't follow
- Researchers: Media sensationalise news
- **Need to work with the media, anyway**
- When an issue is raised by the media, policy makers take them very seriously. A 2012 study by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) with 700 policy stakeholders in six countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya and Nepal) indicated that, over a three-month period, policymakers cited their most common source of information
- Community dissemination: People are tired of being researched. Take samples from them, they are not told what happened later...
- Culture of apathy for change among policy makers - "this is how we do things here" . This needs to change.



Issues raised – Absence of Communication units

Communication efforts fragmented and insufficient due to absence of dedicated and skilled staff /Absence of communication units:

- HDSS cited budgetary constraints or smallness of their sites
- Lack of resources to recruit comms officers and maintain some of the outputs: AR, scientific briefs, policy briefs
- Dual role: Researcher also doing communication. Competing interests, end up communication not given attention.
- Start small have a communication unit or a communication officer with basic skills to do communication work (write articles, photography, website, social media) has media networks.
- Suggestions included projects contributing a small percentage for communication activities.



Questions we are trying to answer

Yes, the potential for INDEPTH to inform policy is immense and there are areas where we have been successful in generating evidence that guides policy making. BUT:

- Do we know all the policies/practices that have been instituted or changed at national and global levels because of the work that the HDSSs do and the results that they produce? Have we documented these successes?**
- Do we know what were the processes involved in bringing about the policy change and which are the key determinants in these processes?**



Way forward - Working together

PEC Strategy – refocus our limited resources and energy

Collating publications from centres (average 500 annually)

INDEPTH Data Repository and INDEPTHStats (appeal for remaining centres to be in the platforms)

Collating examples of impact/Impact case studies templates

Website: Website has an average monthly average of 9000 visitors . New website: More space for centres: photographs, field stories, profiles, reports etc.

Social media: We are very active in social media, encourage you to share pictures, news, announcements, events etc.

Newsletters: Three newsletters, Friday newsletter to centres, Newsletter to the Board and Quarterly newsletter to 6000 stakeholders every three months.

Centres –ALL THESE ARE AVENUES CENTRES COULD USE TO PROMOTE THEIR WORK. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO ONLY DO IMPORTANT WORK, TELL YOUR STORY ABOUT HOW YOUR WORK IS CHANGING LIVES. OTHERWISE PEOPLE WILL REMAIN WITH AN OLD VIEW THAT WE AREGATHERERS...



Conclusion

With funding becoming more competitive, researchers will increasingly be under pressure to demonstrate the return on investment by articulating the impact of research. If funders are to sustain or increase their funding there is need to demonstrate the value of research.



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Centre Leaders for support, together we can do more.

THANK YOU

